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Lloyd Fernando: A Tribute

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Lloyd Fernando: A Tribute

Abstract

I feel very privileged to have been asked to introduce to you all today Professor Lloyd Fernando. Our friendship goes back a long time, just over thirty years to be exact, when many of the young people in the audience were not even born. Our original meeting took place at the very first conference of ACLALS which was held at the University of Queensland in 1968. The Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies had been formed several years before by Professor A.N. Jeffares. I should add here that I have always had problems with the word Commonwealth – Common Wealth? But here is neither the time nor the place for a discussion of the word. It was a very rich and exciting meeting where we were able to meet writers and scholars from all around the former Empire – yes, we could all recite Wordsworth! None of us at that conference would have gone away not enriched. There was a great sense of a common bond, books and ideas were shared and friendships made that would last for many years. At the end of the week we packed our bags and took ourselves off to the four corners of the world hoping to meet again in three years time at the next international conference which was to be held at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica.

ANNA RUTHERFORD

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In 1989 ACLALS held its Silver Jubilee conference at the University of Kent in Canterbury. It was a mammoth conference, magnificently organised by Lyn Innes who I am sure still shudders at the thought of it. We decided that this was the appropriate occasion to honour Derry Jeffares and we did so by presenting him with a festschrift. It was not really hard to think of a title — *A Shaping of Connections* — for that is what that first meeting in Brisbane led to. In the book you will not only find creative material and essays but a collection of photographs taken over the years of delegates at the numerous conferences that have been held around the world. And if you look you will see that the very first photo is of a very young and very handsome Lloyd Fernando feeding a kangaroo at the first conference in Brisbane in 1968.

As I said previously friendships were made at that Brisbane conference that still remain to the present day. One of the lasting friendships I made in Brisbane was with Lloyd Fernando. Our paths have crossed on numerous occasions and Lloyd has always remained for me that very handsome young and generous writer and scholar. I have taught his books to my Danish students. My favourite has always been *Scorpion Orchid*. It is a book which I believe reveals his insight not only into the time in which he wrote it but also into the colonial past and the present day.

I would like to conclude with some lines of verse from an early Australian poet, Mary Gilmore. The poem is called 'Old Botany Bay' and is a tribute to Australia's first white settlers, the convicts, who were shipped by colonial powers, across a world, to steal a continent. I am not reciting the complete poem, simply some lines which I feel appropriate.

I'm old
Botany Bay
Stiff in the joints,
Little to say.

I am he
Who paved the way,
That you might walk
At your ease today;

I was the conscript
Sent to hell
To make in the desert
The living well;

I bore the heat,
I blazed the track —
Furrowed and bloody
Upon my back.

I split the rock;
I felled the tree:
The nation *was* —
Because of me!

It seems to me that Lloyd Fernando is one such pioneer and that we should all join in honouring him for his pioneer work so that such an event as today is possible. Thank you Lloyd.